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Reflecting on »Muslim Worlds – World of Islam?« from a spatial perspective

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The »world of Islam« has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, for example as a geo-political entity, religious community, socio-cultural cosmopolis or global diaspora. Each of these approaches defy a clear-cut geographical delineation of its boundaries; it is generally acknowledged, however, that any definition must reach beyond the borders of states and areas of majority Muslim populations in order to take account of translocal and diasporic communities, as well. But rather than simply employ the notion of a »world of Islam« as a convenient albeit ill-defined shorthand, this paper scrutinises the analytical value and implications of the concept in relation to a reappraisal of the spatiality of Muslim societies.[1] Given the immense, if polyvalent, impact that the so-called spatial turn has had on disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and history, we explore how far the insights produced by this conceptual reorientation could be usefully extended to the study of Muslim societies and localities.[2]

Historically, the relation between space (notably geography) and religion has sometimes been conceptualised in the form of »environmental determinism«. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the monotheistic religions of the Middle East were interpreted as »the logical response to the experience of smallness under the vast, starlit night sky of the desert«.[3] Conversely, a more recent strand has conceptualised the relation between space and religion in terms of religion shaping spatial configurations. With regard to Islam, classical examples of this strand are descriptions and analyses of concrete, physical spaces that are seen as both essential to, and defined by, Islamic faith and Muslim culture. The most obvious example is the mosque, whose architecture and symbolism have been studied across a multitude of geographical settings and historical contexts.[4] Prolific in this strand is also the literature on the idea of the »Islamic city« as a distinct spatial and social ideal type, which has recently been taken to task for its implicit essentialism.[5]

1 This paper reflects on questions which arise from research conducted at ZMO, and particularly in the frame of the working group *Microcosms and Practices of the Local*, between 2008 and 2013. It takes up longer-standing lines of thinking about spatiality and locality which have been pursued at ZMO in the last decade (e.g., Achim von Oppen, *Bounding Villages. The Enclosure of Locality in Central Africa, 1890s to 1990s*, Habilitationsschrift, HUB 2003; Ulrike Freitag, Achim von Oppen, »Translokalität als ein Zugang zur Geschichte globaler Verflechtungen«, ZMO Programmatic Texts 2, 2005 (http://www.zmo.de/publikationen/ProgramaticTexts/pt_translocality_2005.pdf, last accessed August 20, 2012); Ulrike Freitag, Achim von Oppen, *Translocality. The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*, Leiden, Boston 2010).

2 As surveys of the impact that the »spatial turn« had on the humanities and social sciences, see for instance Jörg Döring and Tristan Thielmann (eds.), *Spatial Turn: Das Raumparadigma in den Kultur und Sozialwissenschaften*, Bielefeld 2008, as well as Barney Warf and Santa Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Abingdon Oxon 2009.

3 John Corrigan, »Spatiality and religion«, in Warf and Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn* 2009, 158.

4 For three illustrative examples of an immense literature, see Nuha N.N. Khoury, »The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the tenth century«, *Muqarnas* 13 (1996), 80–98; Katherine E. Kasdorf, »Translating sacred Space in Bijāpur: The Mosques of Karīm al-Dīn and Khwāja Jahān«, *Archives of Asian Art* 59 (2009), 57–80; Eric Roose, *The Architectural Representation of Islam: Muslim-commissioned Mosque Design in the Netherlands*, Amsterdam 2009).

5 See, for instance, A.H. Hourani and S.M. Stern (eds.), *The Islamic City: A Colloquium*, Philadelphia, 1970, and Janet L. Abu Lughod, »The Islamic City: History Myth, Islamic Essence,

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A third strand of spatial scholarship on »the Islamic world« (or parts of it) uses the notion of space metaphorically to denote formations of certain discursive fields. Such work often focuses on the emergence or contestation of Islamically-inflected public spaces, whether highly localised, transnational or virtual in nature.[6] Many of these studies explore the dynamic relationship between a community, or communities, and different media, which are mobilised either to engender homogeneity or to subvert and challenge homogenisation attempts by other actors. Within this field, the study of Muslim diasporas has been particularly productive in its attempts to investigate the localised (re-)imagination of Muslim spaces in new settings on the one hand and the role of increasingly globalised Islamic movements and networks on the other.[7] However, this metaphoric use of spatiality is not the one which is adopted in this paper.

Rather, our agenda in this essay is to explore the relationship between »actual« space and religious experience and belonging. Can we meaningfully speak of »Islamic« spaces or places, and what insights do we gain if we do so? Is there something specific to the ways that Muslims have produced and reproduced their relationship to particular places and localities? Moreover, in engaging with this nexus between place and identity, what social and historical case studies, sources and methodological tools are available to us, as researchers, to describe and understand such processes? Our exploration of these questions is strongly shaped by, and reflects, research and discussions which took place at ZMO from 2008 to 2013.

Our field of investigation is framed in terms of the underlying tension between claims that express normative singularity by their description or analysis of a distinct »Islamic identity« and the practical diversity of Muslim lives. We propose to investigate this tension through an examination of a series of spatial sites and formations from diverse regional and temporal contexts. Besides the relationship between »identity« and locality, the juxtaposition of spatiality (as a methodological perspective, i.e. questioning the production of space through different technologies and media) and concrete, specific places is a central structuring feature of this paper. By drawing on a number of individual case studies, this essay probes the tensions inherent in spatial constructs of Muslim worlds in different regions, over time and across disciplines.

A sense of place, whether experienced or imagined, is a key constituent for the formation of individual and communal subjectivities.[8] Many social communities, Muslim or not, have reconstituted their sense of »longing and belonging« in reference to particular localities and spatial constructs. Locality as well as (religious, kin-based, ethnic and other forms of communal) »identity« invoked – at least at the normative level – to speak of roots and rootedness.

Work on the social production of space[9] has understood spatial formations as reproduced through political relations as well as social ties and networks. As this paper shows, these may invoke various registers, of which religion is just one besides ethnicity, economic relations, technology, etc. Closely observing and analysing the time-specific changes in languages of legitimacy within specific »Muslim worlds« is, of course, at the heart of the historiographic endeavour, and has become an important subject in other disciplines as well. But while communities fashion themselves along the shifting indices of political and intellectual languages, the spaces that provide a supposedly concrete basis for reconstructing the past, history and myths also undergo radical changes. As such, we are required to rethink the temporality of space. It is a provocation, therefore, to analyse not only the dynamic flow of time over a supposedly stable spatial configuration but to see space itself in a process of historical constitution.

Empirical research from a variety of regions shows that individual »Muslim worlds«, understood in spatial terms, can simultaneously be imagined as parts of a translocal »world of Islam« and as decidedly local, situated places in which »Islam« is lived, experienced or enacted in site-specific ways that may differ from experiences of being Muslim in other localities. The production of Muslim spaces in specific locales is intertwined with the emergence of global networks and currents of Islamic thought and discourses on the one hand and with immediate topographical, geographical, mate-

and Contemporary relevance«, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19:2 (1987), 155–176. A systematic critique of Max Weber's classical exposé of the »Islamic City« is Jürgen Paul, »Max Weber und die ›islamische Stadt‹«, in Hartmut Lehmann, Jean Martin Ouédraogo (eds.), *Max Webers Religionssoziologie in vergleichender Perspektive*, Göttingen: 2003, 109-137; from an ethnographic perspective see also Dale Eickelman, »Is there an Islamic city? The Making of a Quarter in a Moroccan Town«, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (1985), 3–24.

6 See, for instance, Tong Soon Lee, »Technology and the Production of Islamic Space: The Call to Prayer in Singapore«, *Ethnomusicology* 43:1 (1999), 26–100, and John R. Bowen, »Beyond Migration: Islam as Transnational Public Space?!«, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30:5 (2004), 879–894.

7 A pioneering contribution to this effort is Barbara D. Metcalf (ed.), *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, Berkeley 1996; see also Roman Loimeier (ed.), *Die islamische Welt als Netzwerk: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Netzwerkansatzes im islamischen Kontext*, Würzburg 2000.

8 Indeed, the conceptual boundary between community and locality often remains blurred (as von Oppen [2003: 5] observes with regard to examples from scholarship on Africa); an example is Appadurai's (1996) ambivalent use of the concept of »neighbourhood«.

9 Henri Lefèbvre, *La production de l'espace*, Paris 1974.

rial, institutional and emotional resources on the other. This reflects the tension between the idea of an (implicitly deterritorialised) Islamic universalism, encapsulated by the notion of a coherent *dār al-Islām* that transcends local particularities, and the increasing emphasis scholars have put on the manifold differentiations of Muslim praxis in specific places and periods.

Social identities and local boundedness

Conceptualising Muslim worlds in concrete spatial terms, rather than metaphorically, has two methodological implications. Firstly (and taking up the initial question of ZMO's current research programme), we base our approach on the understanding that Muslim social actors in specific locations or »worlds« do, of course, not always act »as Muslims«: religious subjectivities and motivations are not necessarily, and not always, meaningful variables for understanding social action.

Secondly, a spatial perspective requires us to incorporate non-Muslim actors into the analysis. Muslim worlds are, and always have been, inhabited by social actors from diverse religious or confessional backgrounds (Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Yezidi, etc.) who interacted with Muslim majority (or, in diasporic situations, minority) populations as rulers, traders, neighbours, colleagues or clients.[10] Even within a Muslim majority community, these differentiations may apply in cases where particular historical-confessional identities (Sunnite, Shiite, Sufi, etc.) are emphasised. Classical examples can be found in studies of »cosmopolitanism« and the religious, ethnic and linguistic pluralism associated, for instance, with the Ottoman Empire.

Practices of ordering and regulating communal life are never simply a purely »local« issue; rather, they reflect wider social and political orders associated with larger-scale contexts such as state or empire. The ways in which communities adapt to changing regional orders are bound up with state or empire centred problematics such as questions of territorial control and governance. At a perhaps more tangible level, the interplay of these different scales in the cultivation and domestication of space becomes visible through material practices (e.g. building, town planning, construction of dams, railway lines, bridges, etc.); they can be studied through images, maps, travelogues, constructions of local histories and topographic narratives, which may be interrogated as to their inscription with narratives about social belonging, identity, legitimacy and authority.

In Ottoman cities, religious belonging mattered as a general criterion of organising social order and social space, but it was by no means the only one. Social differences based on economic status and wealth also led to spatial definition, differentiation and segregation.[11] Although neighbourhoods in Ottoman Istanbul »were usually formed along religious rather than along social lines«, many neighbourhoods consisted of »religiously mixed populations«; in their spatial ordering or segregation, professional and marital status mattered more than religious affiliation. The migrants or »outsiders«, often men without families who came to Istanbul in search of work, were ordered to sleep in specific »bachelor rooms« or Khans to prevent them from disturbing the private/public domains of the *mahalle* (the Ottoman urban neighbourhood) structure. These restrictions pertained to Christian as well as Muslim migrants.[12]

Looking at »Muslim worlds« in terms of concrete urban examples of cohabitation within an imperial framework not only allows us to move beyond the framework of the »Islamic city«. It also enables us to understand Ottoman imperiality in its manifold declensions and forms, which can be usefully approached through the concept of »microcosm«. Historians of Ottoman urban history have used this term in the sense of a place, a concrete material site to be explored, such as a street, a neighbourhood or a city, within which individuals interact. As micro-cosms, these sites are imagined to (potentially) reflect larger-scale imperial or global trends.[13]

10 An example is the spice trade in the Indian Ocean since the Middle Ages, which was significantly carried out by Muslim traders whose trade networks included Jewish, Hindu and also Christian partners, see Sebastian R. Prange, »Like Banners on the Sea: Muslim Trade Networks and Islamisation in Malabar and Maritime Southeast Asia«, in M. Feener and T. Sevea, (eds.), *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia*, Singapore, 2009, 25–47, here 31.

11 Nora Lafi, »Microcosmes urbains et pluralité linguistique: pour une lecture dynamique de la relation entre espace, individu, et identité dans les villes arabes de l'époque ottomane«, in Sabine Bastian, Thierry Bulot, Elisabeth Burr (eds.), Sociolinguistique urbaine et développement durable urbain: Enjeux et pratiques dans les sociétés francophones et non-francophones, München 2009, 143–158; see also Florian Riedler, »Rediscovering Istanbul's Cosmopolitan Past«, *ISIM Review* 22 (2008), 8–9.

12 Florian Riedler, »Public People: Seasonal Work Migrants in Nineteenth Century Istanbul«, in F. Eckardt, K. Wildner (eds.), *Public Istanbul – Spaces and Spheres of the Urban*, Bielefeld 2008, 233–253.

13 For instance, Lafi 2009 (see above). This contrasts with other conceptualisations of »microcosm«, for instance in anthropology or religious studies, as something which organises an individual's experience within a system of analogies, offering a coherent interpretative system. This may be a text, for example, as well as a built structure, but here, too, what is emphasised is the metaphorical meaning which maps an individual within the cosmos. In the words of Mary Douglas, a microcosm »makes a model of the universe, based on established similarities« which are culturally constructed through analogies. This system of analogies provides a community with a referent structure for normative action. Through this ordering of a symbolic conceptual universe, a common lens through which all experience can be

This approach understands cosmopolitanism, in the Ottoman case, as the imperial governance of local microcosms, made of constant negotiations between the various spheres that constituted imperiality, rather than an all-encompassing ideology.[14] The management of this diversity should not be imagined only as a top-down process, but rather as a constant negotiation between different scales of imperiality; in fact, this renegotiation was a constant feature of belonging to the empire itself. The study of historical sources emanating from local communities illustrates how such processes were part of the very nature of the Ottoman Empire.[15] Locality functioned as a factor in defining the empire; and the relationship between these different scales of belonging provided the basis for articulating senses of affection and disenchantment.

Yet the management of this internal diversity has taken very different historical forms; and it does not preclude processes of exclusion, discrimination and even violent conflict.[16] During the first half of the 19th century, for instance, the northern quarters of Ottoman Aleppo, inhabited by a Christian majority population, witnessed a considerable increase in *waqf* (charitable Muslim endowments) construction activities – quite in contrast to the Eastern quarters of the city, populated by poor Muslims. At the same time, a significant »Christian expansion« (i.e. Christian Aleppines settling in other parts of the city than the »traditionally« Christian quarters) occurred, together with a growing number of church building or renovation projects. These two opposing trends coincided with the political emphasis on a legally equal status for Christians in the Ottoman Empire in the Tanzimat reforms. In 1850, this led to violent Muslim-Christian confrontations in Aleppo, which differed from earlier moments of unrest. This time, the violence was mostly directed against Christian quarters with their churches, rather than against Ottoman administrative institutions. These quarters thus became new points of reference in a topography of urban uprising, although churches had not been in any way involved in violent clashes for several centuries.[17]

Architecture

Concrete physical spaces are materially inscribed with communal, including religiously defined, identities. A classical example is the New Mosque of Salonika, the last mosque to be built there before the end of the Ottoman Empire, constructed by Salonika's Dönme community in 1904. The Dönme were an ethnic-religious group who syncretised Jewish (Kabbalah) and Islamic (Sufism) beliefs and practices. Members of this community rose in Salonika's administrative hierarchy and family relations to Dönme in other locations fostered the community's economic success. Legally treated as Muslims, they lived as an endogamous group in separate neighbourhoods with their own schools and places of worship. The New Mosque's eclectic design brought together baroque and Ottoman mosque styles, Moorish flourishes and the modern decorative arts, and even Habsburg Orientalism. Prominent bands of six-pointed stars in marble wrapping, inscribed on the building's exterior and interior, evoke associations with Italian synagogues.[18]

Individual localities can, in specific instances, be read in terms of Islamically inflected moral orders and their transposition into spatial features. Another example is the Mauritanian village Maʾata Moulana. Originally a settlement around a well, it became a centre for the Tijani (Sufi) renewal movement in Mauritania (*faiḍa*) in the late 1950s.[19] Consequently, it was renamed Maʾata Moulana (gift of god) and reframed as a »perfect city« (*madīna kāmila*), where disciples lived and were educated by their sheikh towards becoming »perfect man« (*insān kāmil*). The ideal of a »perfect« order is reflected in the urban structure: Maʾata Moulana is the only village in the region with streets arranged in a straight grid, in contrast to the tent camp structure of neighbouring villages.[20]

But although spatial units (such as a village or a landscape) may be narrated as unchanging, even atemporal constituents of communal identity, spatial features are forever used in different ways, adapted or transformed from generation to generation. Collectivities that are conceptualised (or conceive of themselves) as deeply rooted in time, and as being unified by a common history, may therefore in lived reality often come up against

interpreted is established which allows a community to cohere (Mary Douglas, »The Body/House Cosmogram«, in id., *Jacob's Tears. The Priestly Work of Reconciliation*, Oxford et al. 2004, 133–156, here 134).

14 Ulrike Freitag, Nora Lafi, »Cities Compared: Cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean and Adjacent Regions«, published electronically by Halshs, 2006 (http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/14/93/27/PDF/Freitag-Lafi-Cosmopolitanism.pdf, last accessed August 20, 2012).

15 Nora Lafi, »Cronache civiche e microcosmi cittadini: Tripoli nell'Ottocento«, in Paolo Militello (ed.), *Il Mediterraneo delle città*, Milano 2011, 230–240.

16 Ulrike Freitag, Nora Lafi (eds.), *Rethinking Urban Violence in Middle Eastern Cities* (forthcoming 2014).

17 Feras Krimsti, *Die Unruhen von 1850 in Aleppo. Gewalt im urbanen Raum*. Berlin, forthcoming 2014; also F. Krimsti, »The 1850 Uprising in Aleppo: Reconsidering the Explanatory Power of Sectarian Argumentations«, in Ulrike Freitag, Nora Lafi (eds.), *Rethinking Urban Violence in Middle Eastern Cities* (forthcoming 2014).

18 Marc Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, Stanford 2010.

19 On the faiḍa see Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival*, New York 2011.

20 Britta Frede, *Die Erneuerung der Tiganiya in Mauretanien. Popularisierung religiöser Ideen in der Kolonialzeit*, ZMO Studien 31, Berlin (forthcoming 2014).

conflicting needs, desires and constraints which are spatially circumscribed. An example is the controversial architectural remodelling of Mecca's historic core, including the expansion of the Great Mosque of Mecca, which is one of the spatial focal points of a – however understood – »world of Islam«. While critics regard it as the »commercialisation of the house of God« and fear the divisive effects along class and economic lines, proponents of the project cite the increasing numbers of pilgrims which have to be accommodated and provided for.[21] Thus, different »languages of legitimacy« (historical preservation, »authenticity«, piety, vs. »security«, rationalisation, planning) are invoked in the complex struggles around the material (re) shaping of a symbolically highly charged spatial site.

Temporalities

Conceptualising spatiality and religion necessarily engages the temporal dimension as well. As the aforementioned examples from the field of Ottoman urban studies demonstrate, concrete places like city quarters, market areas or single buildings were used differently and by different people depending on the time of the day. Spaces could change meaning according to the time of day, and social identities changed too according to the time, the place and the context. Daily life in Ottoman towns evolved out of the constant interaction between various spheres through which the individual moved.[22] In such a context, spaces were in no way the mere projection of a repartition of populations, symbols and values according to religion, but themselves the object of constant reinterpretations and negotiations. Spaces were as much »on the move« as ideas, norms and people were.[23] With this important insight modern scholarship was able to modify the monolithic image of the Islamic city and also introduce a gendered perspective into research on city space and its uses in the Islamic world.[24]

This example brings to our attention the significance of manifold modes and »repertoires« of timekeeping. The multiplicity of ways to measure, and account for, the passage of time frequently explicitly engages the religious dimension. In 19th and 20th century Zanzibar, for example, the »right« way of measuring time (for instance to indicate the beginning, and end, of fasting during Ramadan) was an issue of great contention between »traditional« and »modern« elites. Roman Loimeier has circumscribed this multilayered and contentious temporal environment with the term »Zeitlandschaft« (timescape).[25] On the other hand, if »landscape is timescape«, religiously inflected spaces are doubly temporal: religious topologies circumscribe not only the »here and there«, but also link specific places on different temporal scales.[26] For pilgrims to Mecca, temporality is enacted in manifold ways: through the annual recurrence of the lunar month of pilgrimage; through the rhythmic ritual movements through space which constitute the hajj itself (not least, of course, the long-distance journey toward the »heartland« of Islam); and through the imagination of this heartland in spatial as well as temporal terms by reflecting on, and ritually (re)enacting, events of the seventh century B.C.[27] This imagination concretely affects cultural and social orders of space. Thus, Jeddah is conceived as Mecca's spiritual (and of course geographic) »other«: while (inland) Mecca is considered pure and spiritually refined, Jeddah is this-worldly, busy and profanely dedicated to trade.[28]

Temporality comes to the fore when talking about the past and its reconstruction, an ongoing process that is central to negotiations and contestations in the present. The historical and contemporary canonisation of literary or oral interventions has remained one important technique in the process of ossification and crystallisation of communal forms of identity. Genealogies, which may account for kinship and descent, or in other cases record intellectual and/or spiritual connections between scholars, saints or sufis, linking persons and groups, thus denote »identity«, belonging and legitimacy across time. But they may also account for social networks, relations and affinities in terms of space. As such they link specific groups to specific local origins, or reveal local roots of knowledge, learning, and spirituality.

Time and space are brought together in narrative framings of social belonging. The invention

21 See for example http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/30/arts/design/30mecca.html?ref=world-&pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed September 20, 2011).

22 Ulrike Freitag, Nora Lafi, »Daily Life and Family in an Ottoman Urban Context: Historiographical Stakes and new Research Perspectives«, *The History of Family*, 16: 2 (2011), 80–87.

23 We have borrowed this expression from Brigitte Reinwald, Jan-Georg Deutsch (eds.), *Space on the Move. Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, Berlin 2002.

24 See Janet Abu-Lughod, »The Islamic City – Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance«, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, 1987, 155–176, ref. here to 167–169)

25 Roman Loimeier, *Eine Zeitlandschaft in der Globalisierung. Das islamische Sansibar im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2012.

26 Corrigan, »Spatiality and religion«, 172.

27 See Michael N. Pearson, *Pious Passengers. The Hajj in Earlier Times*, New Delhi 1994; also M.N. Pearson, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, Princeton 1995, for a description of the hajj as a form of regular mass tourism which simultaneously creates feelings of religiously inspired belonging and inclusion, as well as exclusion and difference.

28 These attitudes became evident in oral interviews conducted in Jeddah by Ulrike Freitag (personal communication to the authors).

of mythic pasts and the re-telling of the past as a series of (dis)connected events suited to the ideas and ideals of community-formation is a part of the broader intellectual and political processes that go into preparing the language of legitimacy that a community draws upon. The example of the Idaw ʿAli in Mauritania is a case in point. At the end of the 18th century, different Idaw ʿAli communities existed in four different regions of what is today called Mauritania. By 1790, a genealogical text had been written which fixed their migration history and claimed the scholarly and trading centre Chinguetti as their common place of origin. The popularity of that text is reflected in the development of Chinguetti as a central point of reference for scholars who for several generations have lived hundreds of kilometres away. This idea of the Chinguetti origin was included into later written hagiographic texts. Consequently the scholars portrayed by these texts seem to be completely disconnected from their place of birth and living. They appear as scholars from Chinguetti, and this contributes to a further emphasis on Chinguetti as the most important scholarly centre of the Western Sahara. As such, it is invoked as equivalent to North African centres of learning such as Fez, Kairouan and Cairo as well as Middle Eastern cities like Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. In this case, the (re)writing of the past in and of a specific location offers the possibility to transform both the understanding of this place and of social identities and even specific normative orders. Thus Chinguetti is (re)produced as a platform for projecting changing Islamic norms and values.[29]

»Territories« and »borders«

Borders constitute another important field of investigations into spatiality with regard to the theme of »Muslim Worlds – World of Islam?«. The historical developments of regional connections, sometimes tangible and sometimes imagined, pose significant challenges to the ways we assume or conceptualise neat divisions of political boundaries, frontiers and cultural flows.[30] Interestingly, it is not always »connections« that complicate the notion of spatial affinities and boundaries; conflicts also have their own share of »richness« that requires finer analysis of the interplay between community, identity and space, in which, of course, state and non-state actors and institutions play a significant role.

Border spaces may display multiple qualities depending on the optic used to understand them. From the viewpoint of any state, borders and boundaries refer as much to the sense of inclusion and belonging from within as to exclusion from/of outside. They function as zones of regulation. A territory can only be secured and defined when borders are intact, safe and inviolable. Breaches pose a challenge to the authority of the state, while bilateral ties for »opening the borders« become gestures of harmony and friendship. In the investigation of boundaries and border spaces, therefore, separation of the political from the ideological is difficult but necessary to maintain. More recently, as Sassen has argued, new types of border zones have emerged which are still associated with traversing geographical/spatial boundaries, but which are essentially embodied in the social actors who cross the boundaries in question. The contemporary »global city«, according to Sassen, is thus characterised, among other things, by the re-location of the frontier: formerly located »out there«, at the margins of the (colonial) empire, the frontier is now embedded in the very heart of the metropole.[31]

With regard to our theme, boundaries and borders may be envisaged as separating »Muslim worlds« (again, in the concrete sense) from their (non-Muslim) environs. However, religious identities are just one dimension of communal subjectivities besides others, such as ethnic or national ascriptions; in other cases, several different factors may overlap. From the viewpoint of people living in borderlands, the co-ordinates of geographical, emotional and ideological affinity can be multiple; a borderland space may acquire heterogeneous meanings, particularly in a »conflict ridden« area. It is a key concern to understand the different ways in which communities make sense of zones and places that are enframed by states« regulative apparatuses but which transgress the limits of control in everyday negotiation. This perspective brings the temporal dimension to the fore again. Conflicts symbolise uncertainty and senses of belonging remain suspended, sometimes for generations. The passage of time is made sense of in relation to various different registers in any society, and it works differently on the members of the same group and community even while these are based in a geographically bound, uniformly re-

29 Cf. Frede forthcoming 2014.

30 Thus, »Dekkan« was clearly regarded by the Mughal north Indian power first as its frontier region and subsequently as »well-protected territories«, but the Deccan rulers themselves saw their territories as part of the Safavid empire. Nitin Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism in Eastern India: Bihar, 1760s-1880s*. London and New York 2012, 3. See also M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, »The Deccan Frontier and Mughal expansion, ca. 1600: Contemporary Perspectives«, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47:3 (2004), 357–389, here 368, 373.

31 Saskia Sassen, Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages, Princeton 2008; see also Sassen, »When the center no longer holds: Cities as frontier zones«, *Cities* 34 (2013), 67–70, here quoted according to the online version at http://www.saskiasassen.com/PDFs/publications/when-the-center-no-longer-holds.pdf (last accessed 22 November 2013).

cognisable single spatial unit. What may appear so uniform from the outside can be regarded as an aggregation of many dispersed as well as connected differentiated spatial units, which if considered in totality pluralise the way a space or locality ought to be understood. Ties between social actors and »their« place operate not only at the ritual, emotional and material, but also at the temporal level. In a contested territory, it is hard to anticipate and »plan« the future.

Lost places

The postcolonial South, incorporating a large part of an imagined »world of Islam«, contains many such contested border zones. They were created through colonial or postcolonial/post-imperial politics, where political borders were often established by decree and maintained by force, and did not take ethnic or national communal boundaries into consideration. »Kashmir« and »Kurdistan« are just two examples that demonstrate the power of political-ethnic imaginations of community that run counter to current political boundaries on the ground. Here, too, imaginations of specific places intertwine with specific temporal layers, projecting the past into the future. »Kashmiri nationalism«, for instance, appeals to a historic »Princely State«, a political unit which is contested by other actors engaged in this political dispute. However, some Kashmiris currently living in Pakistan originally come from the Indian side of the current border and long for their former homes. The Kashmiri exiled community in Muzaffarabad (the capital of Pakistani Kashmir) thus romanticises the town of Srinagar as an almost mystical »paradise on earth«, arguing that the mountainous place in which they now live is not comparable to the beauty and fertility of the valley which is currently »lost« to them. Longing for a place, as in the case of the Kashmiris settled in Muzaffarabad, is predicated on the sense of displacement. In such cases, communities acquire new forms of identity markers – as part of their claims over a historical past, over spatial roots and, not least, as part of their struggle based upon and caused by displacement. The imagined and the mystified place of the Kashmir valley as the »paradise on earth« provides the basis for real political actions to people whose subjectivity is based on understandings of portable rights.

Victims of forced displacement experience the necessity of coming to terms with the loss of a – actual or imagined, individual or communal – »home«. After the closing of the Euphrates Dam in Syria in 1973, the emergent reservoir flooded more than three-hundred villages, pastures and agricultural land; 60,000 to 70,000 villagers were displaced. To this day, the lost villages are still remembered as sites characterised by social solidarity as well as »purity« of social relations, sentiments and food. This nostalgic longing is embodied both in individual memories and in shared representations, passed on across generations, and may be expressed even by villagers who were born after the flooding and have never experienced life in the old villages. The submerged village becomes an emotionally and normatively loaded focal site which juxtaposes past and present, and against which political or social actions of today may be measured and criticised. However, it is noteworthy that the inscription of particular locations with temporalising narratives is rarely univalent: nostalgic affects may be interwoven with, and complicated by, contrasting narratives of progress and development.[32]

The Euphrates Dam example is a provocation to re-examine relations between nostalgia and spatiality. One might investigate expressions of nostalgia for lost places and sites as a feature of »quietist« subversion of control and governmentality. Beyond that, however, the nostalgic longing for a lost place of the past may form part of an identity-building process. As such, it may serve to (re)structure social relations, and thus translate into political action, as the aforementioned cases, but also the example of Palestine/Israel, amply illustrate.

Mobility, locality, and the constitution of regions

The issue of displacement brings us to our next point, that is, the relationship between movement and mobility on the one hand and locality on the other. In the case of the Mauritanian Tijaniyya, the establishment of Sufi institutions often went hand in hand with the constitution of new spheres of exchange, which sought to retain autonomy from the given political framework. These spheres of (social and territorial) mobility created a certain heterogeneity in the newly established communities. Discourses of shared kinship and/or a common religious practice served as a basis for communal life in the pre-colonial period as much as in the colonial period and after. Both the discourse about kin and the discourse about religion referred to trans-regional networks and fostered a sense of ideological connection between the local community and the Arab heartlands. Therefore, we can distinguish between presented networks based on a specific hierarchical ideology and practiced networks (with flows of people, goods and ideas), which if compared may appear contradictory.[33]

The preceding pages have demonstrated how spaces and places are historically constituted and are therefore subject to transformations. Moreover, in the political arena of power, authority, control and dispute spaces are subjected to regula-

32 Katharina Lange, »›There used to be terrible disbelief.‹ Mourning and Social Change in Northern Syria«, in Baudouin Dupret et al. (eds.), *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*, Edinburgh 2012, 31–39.
33 Frede, forthcoming 2014.

tions and contestations. Focusing on the everyday negotiation of political or geographic boundaries leads us to a complementary perspective, namely the investigation into ways in which »regions« are conceptualised and constituted.

Paradoxically, nodes of control proliferate the ways in which communities relate to, and ascribe claims over, those spaces and places. As the preceding paragraphs make clear, there are multiple practices and representations (emotional, ritual or material) through which senses of locality are produced and sustained »on the ground«. Acts of mobility (ranging from coercive forms like displacement and exile to those of more »voluntary« movements) can also be part of this set of practices and representations that reproduces locality.

The Malabar coast of India, for example, has been linked through the spice trade with Arabia, South East Asia and China since pre-Islamic times. With the emergence of Islam, these trading networks became significant for the shaping of very specific, local »Muslim worlds« which at the same time had a distinctly translocal flavor. As Muslim members of merchant families, Sufis or scholars from the Arabian peninsula contributed to the spreading of Islam. Particular forms of Muslim religious practice and spirituality emerged on the Malabar coast, albeit not through local submission to a presumed form of Islamic orthodoxy emanating from Arabia, but rather through specific forms of »acceptance of Islamic practices into [local] pre-Islamic cosmology and customs«.[34]

Another example is the notion of *vilāyat* in the South Asian context, the meaning of which has shifted over time. Its current meaning – signifying the West and primarily Britain – evolved in the course of the eighteenth century. Before that it was used for the region of Khurasan, Transoxiana, and Iran. Literally, *vilāyat* meant a »dominion«, a »territory governed« and »an inhabited country, district«.[35] But its cultural use, coinciding and overlapping with geographical settings, was quite pronounced. For instance, the founder of Mughal rule in India, Babur, used this term to distinguish between »civilised« and »uncivilised« spaces: *vilāyat* to him meant an agrarian or sedentary region, often in contrast to steppes.[36]

In the course of the First World War, Indian soldiers who were deployed in Europe, as part of the British forces, observed that (contrary to their earlier understandings) there was more than one political unit that could be termed *vilāyat*: other than earlier understandings of the term as referring to Britain specifically, and the West in general, it was now clear that France, Germany and other European states acted as other »Western« powers distinct from, and in opposition to, Britain and each other. The experience of spatial displacement thus led to the differentiation and development of the concept of *vilāyat*, and new imaginations of political and historical processes.[37]

Conclusion

Let us return to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper – namely, can we meaningfully speak of »Islamic« spaces or places? Is there something specific to the ways that Muslims in particular have produced and reproduced their relationship to particular places and localities? We have argued that the production of space in »Muslim worlds« is sometimes shaped by specifically »Islamic« considerations (as examples from Mauritania or Saudi Arabia quoted above have shown), while at other times religious considerations matter neither for the material formation nor the imagined, intellectual or emotional relation between Muslim communities and specific places and spaces. The case studies examined here show that issues and processes in the production of (Muslim) spaces include (in no particular order): experiences of managing internal social diversity; microcosmic reflections of large-scale imperial relations; the (re)construction of spatial ties of the past which anchor social identities and belonging in the present, as well as processes of coming to terms with a »loss of place«; and, finally, the conceptualisation and re-conceptualisation of regions and contested borderlands.

As such, these features are by no means unique to Muslim worlds. What lends these case studies their specificity, however, is the constant potentiality of reference to an overarching »world of Islam«. This may become visible when such a reference is actualised, as in the case of the emergence of a particular street grid in a Mauritanian

34 Prange, »Like Banners on the Sea«, 37, rephrasing David Parkin; see also Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland*, Leiden et al. 2003.

35 Simon Digby, »Beyond the Ocean: Perceptions of Overseas in Indo-Persian sources of the Mughal Period«, *Studies in History* 15:2 (1999), fn. 31, 258–59. In the latter sense *wilayat* is mentioned in *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, a work completed by Saqi Must'ad Khan in 1710, trans. and annot. Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta, 1947, 158 and also in J. Sarkar, trans., »A Description of North Bengal in 1609 A.D.«, *BPP,* 35 (1928), 146.

36 Stephen Dale, »The Poetry and Autobiography of the Babur-nama«, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55: 3 (1996), 641.

37 Ravi Ahuja, »The Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)«, in Heike Liebau et al. (eds.), *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, Leiden et al. 2010, 131–166 and Claude Markovits, »Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front«, in Liebau et al. 2010, 29–54.

village, in the struggles and conflicts surrounding urban planning in Mecca, or in the constitution of the Malabar coast as a particularly »Islamic« space. Or it may, in other cases, remain invisible, in the realm of the possible, superseded by other dimensions of the production of space and place.

This paper has proposed the value of exploring the manifold relations between concrete »Muslim worlds« and the notion of a »world of Islam« (as well as the inherent tension between the two) as referent scales for making Muslim identities. This could be achieved further through the investigation of more specific thematic fields. Among the numerous possibilities, one obvious channel would be to look more closely at the role of cities as focal points and »laboratories« of social, technological and cultural change, while not neglecting the conflicts and contestations arising from the changes in question.

Another topical question in the rapidly transforming societies of the global South, is the issue of how social identities, rights and obligations are negotiated in particular local contexts through questions of resource use and extraction. In these often conflictual situations, local belonging is articulated practically as well as discursively, often invoking (and reshaping) translocal normative or spiritual value systems.

For future research, we propose to move these two thematic fields into the centre of investigation, as two practical avenues for engaging with »Muslim worlds – world of Islam?« from an empirical perspective.

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